

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**IS THE ONE YEAR COMBAT DEPLOYMENT RIGHT FOR THE ARMY?**

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This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

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Report Documentation Page			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188		
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE <b>30 MAR 2007</b>		2. REPORT TYPE <b>Strategy Research Project</b>		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2006 to 00-00-2007</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Is the One Year Combat Deployment Right for the Army?</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) <b>Mark Forman</b>				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA, 17013-5050</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT <b>See attached.</b>					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>21</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

## **ABSTRACT**

AUTHOR: Colonel Mark Forman

TITLE: Is the One Year Combat Deployment Right For the Army?

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 30 March 2007      WORD COUNT: 5851      PAGES: 21

KEY TERMS: Dwell, Stress, Morale, Combat, Tour length, PERSTEMPO

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

The United States Armed Forces currently operate with varied combat tour lengths. The U.S. Army is generally on a one year deployment cycle. The other services have shorter combat tour lengths. The U.S. Navy, Marines, and Air Force operate on a four to seven month deployment cycle and have for many years. With some exceptions, the U.S. Army has used the one year deployment cycle for most of its combat operations. The House of Representatives has recently passed a measure written by Congressman Tanner (Tennessee), requiring the Army to consider shortening the length of deployments. Senior Army leaders have expressed the desire to shorten deployments, stating that a six or nine month deployment would be preferable.

This paper evaluates three strategic policy courses of action (i.e., nine month, six month or four month combat tours) for the Army, for its deployment length and the effects on Soldiers and their families. It will address the core question of what are the effects of the varied combat tour length and recommends a policy change to six month combat deployments.



## IS THE ONE YEAR COMBAT DEPLOYMENT RIGHT FOR THE ARMY?

It is common knowledge for combat tour lengths, across the United States (U.S.) Military, to vary among and within services, to a significant degree. The U.S. Army has the longest active component tour length of one year “boots on the ground” or BOG, while the U.S. Air Force has the shortest at 90 to 120 days. While each military service varies in tour lengths, inconsistencies in deployment lengths also occur within individual services. Within the U.S. Army today, some personnel are deploying for only 60-90 days, while others for six months and yet others for one year, or longer. Why does this matter? It matters because the U.S. military will be engaged in the “Long War” for many years to come. The same pool of deployable Soldiers will be used to fight, sustain and support the War on Terror (WOT) for the foreseeable future. Potentially, the adverse effects on Soldier and family morale are significant. According to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Peter Pace, “specifically, if you sit around a dining facility with service members from all four services, they all have different tour lengths...it may compute math wise, but it doesn’t in peoples’ minds and hearts...that’s the biggest morale factor that I’m aware of when I travel.”<sup>1</sup> This inconsistent strategic policy is in need of review and adjustment in order to meet the demands of the WOT and alleviate the stress on U.S. Army Soldiers and their families. Having the combat deployment lengths standardized, and the burden that is associated with those deployments minimized, is an essential requirement for maintaining a combat effective, all volunteer U.S. Army.

### Background

There are three preliminary assumptions that must be provided up front in this analysis: first, that the nation will not support a conscript military (draft), unless there is a full conventional war with a peer adversary. Second, the “Long War”, which is the U.S. Army term for the WOT; will continue into the next decade. Finally, a draft to provide an expanded force pool will not occur in the next five years.

Over the past 30 years the U.S. Army end-strength and available fighting forces have steadily dwindled. In the 1970s, the U.S. Army was twice the size of the force we have in uniform today, with over 2 million men and women serving in the U.S. Army, and 1.36 million in the active-component.<sup>2</sup> By the 1990s the U.S. Army had reduced its end-strength by 500,000 Soldiers, to 732,000. Throughout the 1990s, the total U.S. Army force drew down to a meager 482,400.<sup>3</sup> The active-component today is less than 40 percent of the forces available in 1970. This lack of strategic depth, compounded by an exploding mission load, precludes poor employment practices.

Today, U.S. Army Forces are deployed to 120 countries (including active-component forces stationed overseas) with over 260,000 Soldiers overseas today.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, since 2001, more than 650,000 Soldiers have deployed to Afghanistan or Iraq, including over 170,000 who have served multiple tours to either or both countries.<sup>5</sup> These current and projected future combat deployment trends necessitate that the U.S. Army, and the nation's leaders, develop a combat deployment cycle that is sustainable within resource constraints over the next decade.

The strategic implications of an untenable combat deployment cycle are extremely adverse and looming. According to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism*, the long term war on terrorism will vary in degrees of intensity for years: "defeating extremism can be expected to require decades of effort."<sup>6</sup> *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* states that:

Comprehensive defeat of terrorist extremists and other irregular forces may require operations over long periods, and using many elements of national power; such operations may require changes to the way we train, equip and employ our forces, particularly for fighting terrorists and insurgents and conducting stability operations."<sup>7</sup> This strategic vision goes on to state: "we must plan for...extended stability operations involving substantial combat and requiring the rapid and sustained application of national...capabilities."<sup>8</sup>

More recent testimony by the Chief of Staff, of the U.S. Army, GEN Peter J. Schoomaker, articulates the long term posture he is calling for the U.S. Army to adopt in order to meet the demands of the WOT. He stated, "The nation must begin by acknowledging that these are increasingly dangerous times and realize that we are actually closer to the beginning than the end of the Long War."<sup>9</sup> He continues, "the situation in the Middle East and the rest of the world leads me to conclude we are on a new long term plateau of high operational demand..."<sup>10</sup> These policy statements, and the rationale behind them, lead to a conclusion that the Army's requirement to generate combat forces will continue well into the next decade. This in turn requires that policy makers develop strategic options to meet these emerging demands.

At the heart of the unsustainable combat deployment rate is the fact that the existing forces are insufficient to meet the demand. A significant expansion of the U.S. Army will take years to accomplish and will not immediately affect the flow of forces into the WOT. The new Secretary of Defense, Robert M. Gates, announced 11 January 2007, two significant changes in the availability of forces in support of the WOT and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The first is a recall of Army National Guard units that have already fought in Iraq to serve second tours, reversing a long standing policy that allowed National Guardsman to return home for five years before re-deploying.<sup>11</sup> The second was a request by Secretary Gates for the President to authorize the expansion of the Army and Marine Corps by 92,000 troops, growing the U.S. Army by 65,000, to

547,000 Soldiers and the Marine Corps by 27,000, to 202,000 Marines.<sup>12</sup> GEN Schoomaker stated that, “a reduction of demand for forces is something we do not control,” and “to grow the active-component..., optimistically, we could add 6,000 to 7,000 Soldiers a year.”<sup>13</sup> These are seen as policy reversals for President Bush’s administration and are indicators that the stress on the overall available troop strength is becoming unbearable under the existing policies. According to a Congressional Budget Office report in November, 2003, these changes are essential because the US Army did not have enough active-component forces to simultaneously maintain the Iraq Operation at its current size, and sustain all of its other commitments.<sup>14</sup>

### The Core Problems Associated With Extended Combat Deployments

With increasing numbers of Soldiers from all components of the U.S. Army (i.e., Active, Guard and Reserve) deploying in support of the WOT, the long term effects of combat tour length inequality are only now beginning to surface. Specifically, the effects on retention for the U.S. Army are not fully known; however, one comprehensive study, by Wong et al, examined the effects of multiple deployments on Soldier’s intentions to stay in the Army.<sup>15</sup> In the study, their findings indicated that previously deployed Soldiers are more inclined to leave the Army than Soldiers who have not deployed. More recently, high OPTEMPO has been attributed to an increased difficulty to recruit young men and women. The active duty U.S. Army began missing its recruiting goals in February 2005, when it fell short of its monthly goal by 27 percent for the first time since 2000, and at the end of 2005, the active U.S. Army fell 6,627 recruits short of its annual goal of 80,000.<sup>16</sup> In 2006, the U.S. Army met the active component recruiting goal; however, the number of moral waivers and Category IV recruits both increased significantly in order to attain the goal.

Intuitively, one may conclude that varying lengths of combat duty are detrimental to the morale of the Soldiers and their family members. Currently, the average U.S. Marine Corps tour length is seven months and both the Navy and Air Force ranges from four to six months, making the variations significant. In May, 2006, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a measure written by Tennessee Congressman John Tanner requiring the Army to consider a shift from year long deployments to six month deployments.<sup>17</sup> The rationale for this legislation is to improve morale of Soldiers and alleviate the strain placed on the families who are left behind for a year, or more.

The human dimension of the problem of extended combat deployments is staggering. There is the distinct possibility that extended operations in Iraqi and Afghanistan could mean that many individuals can expect to deploy to one of these operations on a yearly basis. With

the recent 21,500 troop level “surge” called for by President Bush, 10 January 2007, the continued commitment and growth of U.S. Forces in support of the Iraqi operations remains clear. The full range of adverse effects on troop morale and military family life, when faced with growing deployment rates, lengthy deployments, increasing PERSTEMPO demands, and repeated exposure to combat environments, are now starting to strain the U.S. Army. According to one congressional report, “commanders at all levels [are] reporting that Army families are becoming increasingly anxious, even angry, about current and future deployments.”<sup>18</sup> There is a strong possibility that many Army units scheduled to deploy to Iraq in 2007 will have less than the required one year period for rest, retraining and recuperation, a process known as “dwell time”. This is only one indicator that signals that the U.S. Army is approaching a rate of deployment that cannot be sustained without breaking the force. In a recent *Army Times* article, Major General Richard Formica, the Director of Force Management (in the office of the G-3) stated that it will take until the year 2013 to attain the desired “dwell time” of one year deployed for every two years not deployed for the active component forces.<sup>19</sup>

#### Indicators of Strain on the U.S. Army Soldiers and Families

Other, less tangible indicators of the strain on U.S. Army personnel are being seen as trends over the past five years. Since 9-11, the divorce rate of U.S. Army personnel has increased significantly. Notably, between the attacks of 9-11, and 2004, the divorce rates among active U.S. Army officers tripled, and rates among Army enlisted Soldiers grew by 50 percent as deployments lengthened and the frequency of deployments increased.<sup>20</sup> Family member abuse cases are on the rise, and reports of the severity of military domestic violence are increasing. Prior to 9-11, about 35 to 50 cases of domestic violence were reported each month.<sup>21</sup> Remarkably, the rate of domestic violence grew to approximately 143 cases a week in 2005, a twelve fold increase. The U.S. Army is also seeing an escalation in the severity of violence in the more recent cases.<sup>22</sup> There are some studies that indicate that the severity of violence escalates commensurate with the length that the offender is deployed. Additionally, the number of reported sexual assaults across the U.S. Military has risen dramatically in the past year, representing a 40 percent increase across the Department of Defense.<sup>23</sup> These trends represent a growing body of evidence that the all volunteer force is being pushed to, and potentially beyond its limits.

A recent report from a Mental Health Advisory Team, dispatched from the Office of the Surgeon General, Multinational Force – Iraq and the Office of the Surgeon General, U.S. Army Medical Command reveals many of the same adverse indicators for mental health concerns in



theater. In the Key Findings section of the report, these trends were noted: deployment length and family separation were the top two non-combat stressors for both active and reserve component Soldiers, that multiple deployers reported significantly higher concerns about the length of deployments and those with multiple deployments had greater stress on families due to deployment length and the lack of time between deployments.<sup>24</sup> In the report, a total of 1,124 Soldiers from nine brigade combat teams (BCTs) located at 13 forward operating bases (FOBs) and associated units throughout Iraq participated in this in depth study.<sup>25</sup> Observations found in this report included these notable responses to the question from first time deployers, “what were the negative aspects of the deployment?” That the Army tour length was much too long, [especially since] other DoD tours are shorter, family separation and months without a day off.<sup>26</sup> For Soldiers on multiple deployments (at least two Iraq combat tours of 9-12 months) the question changed slightly to, “how was this deployment worse?” These seasoned Soldiers noted that they experienced increased stress on families and that they did not have enough time with families between deployments.<sup>27</sup> Some respondents emphasized that they were worried that the increasing deployments would lead to an increase in divorces.<sup>28</sup> These findings support with emerging evidence how the multiple and lengthy U.S. Army combat deployments are beginning to effect the Army Soldier and his family in an adverse and potentially lasting manner.

The adverse effect of multiple combat tours is another strategic implication of the current combat deployment policy. The number of U.S. Army personnel on second, third and even fourth combat tours is growing. A substantial risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) cases throughout the U.S. Army's ranks is increasing at a proportional rate. According to a recent U.S. Army mental health survey, Soldiers serving with repeated Iraq deployments are 50 percent more likely than those with one tour to suffer from acute combat stress, raising their risk of PTSD.<sup>29</sup> The survey's findings of this increased risk are a wake up call for senior leaders throughout the military. This study builds on earlier U.S. Army studies showing that up to 30 percent of troops deployed to Iraq suffer from depression, anxiety and PTSD. With some Soldiers spending only a year or less between deployments, those suffering from these mental health issues are returning to combat environment while still not fully recovered from the adverse physiological effects of the previous combat tour. Soldiers with multiple combat tours reported greater concern over the length of the 12 month deployments than those on their first tour and were more likely to give lower ratings for their own morale and that of their units, which 55 percent described as low.<sup>30</sup>

Another aspect of this problem is that of the individual Soldier's fatigue. The physical, mental and emotional drain of a one year combat tour on the Soldier and the family is

tremendous. The majority of personnel deployed for a year experience a great deal of fatigue. This may be caused by the routine, extended duty day of 12 to sometimes 20 hours a day, for six to seven days a week, for weeks on end. It may be a combination of continuous operations in the harsh environment, and inability of the Soldier to sleep when given the opportunity to, or it may be caused by other factors. The bottom line is, when Soldiers return on rest and recuperation leave, the vast majority will be exhausted. They partially recover, and then must redeploy into theater for another six months. The family members at home, especially the spouse, are subject to a greater demand on their physical, mental and emotional reserves. They too will have a greater work load, to include the lengthy work day, imposed by the absence of their spouse. This all accumulates and builds through the entire 365-plus day deployment. This fatigue alone accounts for a large effort in the re-integration and reunion process upon the final end-of-tour redeployment and makes the Soldier more susceptible to poor judgments and misbehavior.

#### U.S. Army Senior Leadership is Aware of the Problem

It is evident that as early as 2004 the U.S. Army leadership began considering shorter combat tour lengths. The Army Vice Chief of Staff, GEN Richard Cody, said “we know six months is about right, over the long haul.”<sup>31</sup> Additionally, both GEN Peter Schoomaker and Army Forces Commanding General, Dan K. McNeill, have stated publicly that six, or nine month tours of duty would be preferable.<sup>32</sup> Yet, among some U.S. Army leaders there remains a school of thought that the one year combat tour length is beneficial.

A recent four star speaker at the U.S. Army War College stated that he thought that the nature of the current conflict and our enduring relationships with the indigenous population, leaders and elites, required our forces to remain deployed on a one year basis. His concern for continuity and a traditional Muslim cultural norm of building relationships may be appropriate for some of the U.S. Army; however, the vast majority of the personnel deployed in support of the current combat operations have little, if any, interaction with local populations, Iraqi or Afghan provincial and national leadership. The infantryman, mechanic and truck driver all come to mind, not to mention thousands of other Soldiers who serve their tours in a forward operating base (FOB), and are rarely required to exit it. When they do, they have a specific mission; with little, or no contact with the indigenous population occurring. A one year deployment for these Soldiers does not promote or facilitate any of the reasons suggested for the lengthy deployments.

Although some individuals or units may deploy for shorter lengths of time per deployment, the national commitment of military forces will continue to extend into the distant future. A long term military commitment and a more sustained diplomatic engagement effort appears essential to addressing the relationships challenge; however, the military does not require the entire deployable force structure for the extended combat tour of a year, or more. Selected individuals or specific units may need to be deployed for year long combat tours to address this requirement.

#### U.S. Military Forces Deployment Timing, Process and Procedures

The impact of a deployment goes beyond the actual BOG. U.S. Army personnel, whether assigned to a deploying unit, or deploying as an individual augmentee, will undoubtedly spend additional time training, processing and preparing for the combat deployment. If a Soldier is part of a unit, he will have an extensive train up, to include a mission rehearsal exercise (MRE) conducted at a training center and additional local and potentially other non home-station exercises. As an individual augmentee, a mandatory individual training and deployment readiness process will occur at a CONUS Replacement Center (CRC). The CRC process can add three to six weeks to a deployment, depending on the individual's ability to meet the readiness requirements. Although the Soldier is not actually deployed to a combat zone, these days, and the sometimes lengthy travel times, still contribute to the overall PERSTEMPO and the time separated from the family.

The U.S. Army has had problems with extremely high PERSTEMPO for the past decade. A way to monitor PERSTEMPO is to study the frequency of deployment and the duration of those deployments for a specified period of time. All of the assigned Soldiers of a unit are generally subject to a similar PERSTEMPO and therefore can be tracked on a unit deployment basis. Determining that maximum PERSTEMPO threshold has been difficult given the demands placed on the U.S. Army over the past five years. Another potential method of PERSTEMPO control is to track the days a deployable Soldier spends in a unit, in relationship to the number of times that individual actually deploys. Personnel managers could limit the number of assignments to deployable units, or recommend against deploying a unit with extraordinarily high operational tempo (OPTEMPO). Upon reaching a Department of Defense, PERSTEMPO threshold, an individual Soldier meeting the cut off criteria would be transferred to a non-deploying unit or duty assignment. This PERSTEMPO regulating process is similar to that of the U.S. Navy's, which limits the amount of time each Sailor spends afloat, or deployed

abroad. The Navy has used this method successfully while executing a six months “work up”, then six months afloat or deployed and finally, six months of shore duty for the typical Sailor.

The U.S. Air Force took drastic steps in the late 1990s to restructure their force in order to gain control of the numerous deployments many of its personnel were executing; a high percentage of these deployments were on short, or no notice. The number of deployments made by individual airman in a given period of time was not being tracked. Consequently, some personnel with “high demand, low density” specialties and skills were repeatedly deployed while other personnel did not deploy at all.<sup>33</sup> This same problem exists with U.S. Army low density personnel and units today.

The U.S. Army recognized the need for a more expeditionary deployment process and began the implementation of transformation initiatives, such as the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) model. The ARFORGEN model is a structured progression of increased unit readiness over time, resulting in recurring periods of availability of trained, ready and cohesive units prepared for operational deployment in support of regional combatant commander requirements.<sup>34</sup> The ARFORGEN process will create operational readiness cycles wherein individual units increase their readiness over time, culminating in full mission readiness and availability for deployment. The goal is to be able to generate forces that will support one operational deployment in three years for the active-component and one operational deployment in six years for the reserve-component.<sup>35</sup> The ARFORGEN model, once fully implemented, may prove to reduce actual PERSTEMPO; however, until the U.S. Army can disengage from current combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan it will be extremely difficult to accomplish this objective.

There is potential with the U.S. Army restructuring from division to brigade based units to enlarge the available force pool and allow Soldiers and units more time between deployments and shorten the overall duration of those deployments. This restructuring is referred to as “modularity”. With as many as 48 combined arms brigade combat teams and an increased size of maneuver organizations, the U.S. Army will field at least 77 brigade combat teams by the year 2011.<sup>36</sup> This growth in the deployable force pool, combined with the U.S. Army assigning Soldiers to brigades for longer periods, will increase combat readiness and reduce turnover. With more Soldiers remaining available for deployment on any given day, the Army will move from an individual replacement process to a unit process. This should allow Soldiers to train, deploy, fight and redeploy together, a factor that has proven over time to reduce stress, guard against PTSD, reduce poor unit cohesion and increase family support operations success. Unit

replacement creates greater stability and predictability for Soldiers and families and reduces the strain of high OPTEMPO.

U.S. Army doctrine dictates that for every unit deployed, two units are held in reserve. As of September 2006, the U.S. Army has only one unit in reserve for every unit deployed.<sup>37</sup> The Army currently has 39 active duty combat brigades available under the modularity plan, with a projected FY 2007 end state of 42 Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs). In FY 2007, approximately 20 combat brigades will remain committed to Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>38</sup> This projection pre-dates the Presidential directive for a “surge” force of 21,500 in Iraq and anticipated a steady reduction of forces required in Afghanistan, as NATO forces assumed more of the burden there. That assumption has proven to be overly optimistic, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division receiving four month extension orders in late January, 2007.

#### Projection of the Adverse Effects on Future U.S. Army Retention and Recruiting

The strategic implications of the one year combat deployments are beginning to fester and appear in the services spending trends with regard to recruiting and retention. The U.S. Army has had to increase the military pay and benefits for its personnel by approximately 29 percent from 2000-2004, in order to attract new recruits and retain its serving members.<sup>39</sup> The largest projected cost increase is for military pay, that the Department of Defense projects will grow annually by three and one-half percent through the year 2009. This in concert with the combat zone tax benefits will represent a combined cost of approximately \$6.4 billion dollars.<sup>40</sup> This is a huge expense considering the previous years of the all volunteer Army growth and the forecasts for an additional 7,000 Soldiers annually.

Without a reduction in unit OPTEMPO, and a slowing of individual Soldier PERSTEMPO, the Army will begin to experience increased recruiting and retention shortfalls. As the pace of operations has steadily grown, the Army’s ability to retain Soldiers has been remarkably responsive. This can be accounted for by “tax free” first and second term reenlistments, when conducted in a combat zone. In an effort to enhance retention, substantial additional bonuses are also being offered for combat reenlistments.<sup>41</sup> In FY 2006, the U.S. Army operated at a deficit of approximately 18,000 personnel in the junior enlisted ranks.<sup>42</sup> This means that even if it is able to meet the lofty recruiting and retention goals, the U.S. Army can expect to remain undermanned in these junior enlisted ranks by about 30,000 Soldiers when stop loss actions are included.<sup>43</sup> With these factors being considered it is worth noting that so many of the force has chosen to remain in uniform. Is it reasonable to assume that they will continue to do so, in the face of third and fourth, year long combat deployments in such a compressed period of time?

Low morale, as a result of the lengthy, one year combat deployments can also affect the U.S. Army officer corps. The ability to retain captains, majors and lieutenant colonels is becoming more difficult and more senior officers are retiring at the first opportunity. An indicator of this manning challenge is the promotion rate increases across the officer corps and the growing officer attrition rates. In 2005, the U.S. Army promoted an astonishing 97 percent of all eligible captains to the rank of major, up from a historical average of 75 percent.<sup>44</sup> More extraordinary was the promotion rate from major to lieutenant colonel, at 86 percent eligible, up from previous averages of 70 percent.<sup>45</sup> It is speculated that this was done in order to fill the added officer positions created by the transition to the modular force and to off-set a higher number of resignations in the wake of multiple unit rotations to Iraq and Afghanistan. The junior officer (lieutenants and captains) attrition rate rose from 6.3 percent, to 8.6 percent in 2004 while majors rose from 6.4 percent to seven percent in 2005.<sup>46</sup> The rate of lieutenant colonels departing the U.S. Army was the highest in more than a decade, at over 13 percent, in 2005. These statistics support the premise that the strain on the Soldier and the family is growing to the point that they are beginning to vote with their feet, choosing to complete their service obligations and seek employment in the civilian sector.

#### Strategic Deployment Length Options for U.S. Army Combat and Other Operational Tours

The military requirements for the conduct of a counterinsurgency are population control and local security. These requirements demand a military strategy that provides for a quantity of security forces (either police or military) in proportion to the population and the geography of the battle space. Essential to such a military operation are security forces that protect the population and deny support to the insurgents. In reconstruction and stability operations, the force dedicated to establishing order will generally be larger in number than the forces dedicated to the combat operations phase of a campaign. These forces are more concerned with the political aspects of a “hearts and minds” counterinsurgency campaign. History shows that counterinsurgency operations generally take an extended period of time to be successful. The current adversaries of the United States in the WOT are prepared to fight for as long as it takes to accomplish their objectives. According to some counterterrorism experts, “Al-Qaeda is planning for the long term, a decade into the future..., gradually fielding more than one thousand operatives in Europe over the next ten years.”<sup>47</sup> Considering an enemy with such a patient mind set and the acknowledgements by U.S. leaders that this will be a “long war”, a sustainable, long term military employment strategy must be developed to address this problem.

There are many potential strategic policies to address this growing problem. With the long term projections for increased deployments and conflicts erupting in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa on a routine basis, a sustainable deployment rate is imperative. Three possible deployment options (four, six and nine months duration) will be discussed, with a recommendation for a six month BOG combat deployment, as the policy the U.S. Army should employ to sustain its current and projected force requirements.

#### Option 1 – Four Month Combat Deployments

The first strategic policy option is for the U.S. Army to adopt the U.S. Air Force's, policy of a four month combat deployment. This provides several obvious advantages: the forces actually in combat will only be exposed to the hazards of the combat environment for a very limited period of time, family hardship is cut down significantly to a level 66 percent less than the current one year deployment, and there is no need to redeploy and deploy the Soldier for a Rest and Relaxation (R & R) Leave at the mid-point of the combat tour. A break of some sort, such as a four day, out of theater pass, should be considered in order to sustain mentally and physically alert personnel. The disadvantages are: limited time for deployment "friction," often caused by weather or limited transportation assets, reduction of the time for integration and "right seat ride" orientation for the outgoing and incoming key leaders, and the myriad of sustainment and logistics support tasks would have to be increased three-fold from the current rate of unit and personnel turnover. This option is not widely used by other services or nations; thus there is limited experiential data available on the strategic value of this deployment timing.

#### Option 2 – Six Month Combat Deployments

The second strategic policy option is a six month combat deployment. This is the combat deployment length that the U.S. Navy uses and is similar to the U.S. Marines (seven months), as well as most troop contributing nations to ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The advantages of the six month combat deployment are numerous: allows for a mid-tour leave, if deemed necessary by the executing combatant command, retains a greater degree of time for "right seat ride" orientation and integration into the combat environment, it reduces the time of the family hardship by 50 percent from the current year long deployments, brings the Soldier more in line with the Sailor, Marine and to some extent, Airman, as well as the coalition partner forces, and reduces the level of exhaustion experienced by Soldiers when deployed in combat for a year at a time and finally, it allows for a good level of strategic flexibility in the event the unit is required to be extended. These disadvantages remain: there may be some positions that the ability to build a strong relationship with the local population or key leadership may be

inhibited, until the ARFORGEN model and modularity are fully implemented the number of deployments will remain on the rise, and there will be double the current requirements for logistical support and sustainment turnover operations.

### Option 3 – Nine Month Combat Deployments

Finally, the nine month combat deployment will be discussed. The advantages of the nine month deployment are: it allows for a greater amount of time to conduct “right seat ride” and combat integration, it provides more continuity for relationship building (when that is a required element of the deployed Soldier), reduces the logistical and sustainment transition burden, and nine months will provide some strategic flexibility for the potential extension of a unit or individual Soldier in combat, while providing a 25 percent reduction of the family hardship from current deployment timings. The disadvantages are as follows: the nine month combat tour remains significantly longer than the other services and nations, and there would be only a slight reduction in the strategic flexibility provided in the event that an extension is required. The individual level of fatigue would remain, to a large degree, similar to the year long deployers causing a mid-tour R and R Leave program to remain in effect.

Previous U.S. Army protracted combat experience shows that we have learned little over the decades that have passed in the interim since we drew the Vietnam conflict to a close over 30 years ago. In Vietnam, American Soldiers and Marines served operational combat tours as long as 12 to 13 months.<sup>48</sup> More recently, most western governments have been reluctant to impose such enduring individual and unit commitments. European countries and the United States had evolved to six month, or less tours in peacekeeping operations (i.e., Sinai, Bosnia, Kosovo, etc.). Even in the multi-national efforts that are evolving in Afghanistan, the force contributing nations to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), send their combat troops to Afghanistan on a traditionally effective six month combat tour.

### Recommended Option – Six Month Combat Deployments

The comparison of the three strategic policy options: four, six and nine month combat deployments, leads one to believe that the six month combat deployment is the way to go. The difficulty arises with the current over stretched U.S. Army posture. This option is an obvious benefit to both the Soldier and the family; however, the ability to implement this option rests on the following factors: the U.S. Army’s transformation to modularity; effective implementation of the ARFORGEN model (projected to be complete in FY 2013); the recruitment, training and fielding of the expanded U.S. Army end-strength; and finally, changes to the strategic employment process of the reserve-component. The sooner the U.S. Army can effect these



changes to its force structure and implement them, the sooner the U.S. Army can adjust to the six month combat deployment. Thus, making a policy change to a shorter combat tour for the U.S. Army may make great sense in the long term strategic view; it may simply not be feasible in the near term.

#### Final Thoughts on This Strategic Dilemma

Less apparent than the stress and anxiety the Soldier may encounter is the mounting stress that the Soldier's family members have to endure. With the recent trend of extending units already in the midst of one year deployments (units from Alaska, Germany and New York) and the stretched manning levels of the active component force, will this be the straw that broke the camel's back? Families of the most patriotic and self-less mold will begin to question why they have to continuously sacrifice so much. I suggest that if we maintain the current pace and duration of U.S. Army combat deployments it will result in many of the best Soldiers deciding that a military career is too perilous and taxing for them and their families. Will a shift to a six month combat deployment policy for the U.S. Army forces result in greater retention, enhanced recruiting and decreased stress? I can not predict the future with 100 percent clarity; however, I can project that it will have a significant positive effect on the U.S. Army, boost morale of the Soldiers and their families and most importantly, demonstrate an enduring commitment to the professionals who stand on point for our Nation during this time of war.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Jim Garamone, "Pace says differing tour lengths affect deployment morale," *American Forces Press Service, Armed Forces Information Service News Articles* (October 5, 2006; available from <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=1461>).

<sup>2</sup> GEN Peter J. Schoomaker, statement before the Commission on National Guard and Reserves (Washington D.C.: Record Version, 14 December 2006), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon Sullivan, *Association of the United States Army Torchbearer National Security Report*, 2006 and Beyond: What the U.S. Army is Doing (Arlington, Virginia, 27 March 2006), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ann Scott Tyson, *Repeat Iraq Tours Raise Risk of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Washington D.C., The Washington Post, 20 December, 2006); available from [http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/document?\\_m=cd3684a5ee1112df63278e12ebab87e6](http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/document?_m=cd3684a5ee1112df63278e12ebab87e6); internet accessed 10 January, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> GEN Peter Pace, *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* (Washington D.C.: The Pentagon, 1 February 2006), 21.

<sup>7</sup> Donald H. Rumsfeld, *The National Defense Strategy of The United States of America* (Washington D.C.: The Pentagon, March 2005) pages 14 and 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>9</sup> GEN Peter J. Schoomaker, statement before the Commission on National Guard and Reserves (Washington D.C.: Record Version, 14 December 2006), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Spiegel, *The Conflict in Iraq: Back in Action* (Los Angeles, CA, Los Angeles Times 12 January, 2007); available from [http://web.lexis-exis.com/universe/document?\\_m=cd3684a5ee11112df63278e12eba87e6](http://web.lexis-exis.com/universe/document?_m=cd3684a5ee11112df63278e12eba87e6); internet; accessed 12 January 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> GEN Peter J. Schoomaker, *Chief: Army needs to grow* (Association of the United States Army news, volume 30, number 4, February 2007) 2.

<sup>14</sup> Douglas Holtz-Eakin, Director Congressional Budget Office (CBO), CBO Testimony *The Ability of the U.S. Military to Sustain an Occupation in Iraq* (Washington D.C.: Committee on Armed Services U.S. House of Representatives, November 5, 2003), page 5. The [...]“or less,”] was added by the author to emphasize that even a policy adjustment allowing a consistent one year deployment was considered unattainable in 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Leonard Wong, Paul Bliese, and Ronald Halverson, "Multiple Deployments: Do They Make a Difference?" Paper presented at the Biennial Conference of the InterUniversity Seminar on Armed Forces and Society, Baltimore, MD, October, 1995.

<sup>16</sup> William J. Perry, Michele A. Flournoy, *The U.S. Military: Under Strain and at Risk* (Arlington Va: May 2006, Vol. 90, Iss. 630) page 15; available from <http://proquest.umi.com/pdqlink?Ver=1&Exp=02-12-2012&FMT=7&DID=1040339891>; internet accessed 16 February, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> John Tanner, *Congressional Press Releases* (Washington D.C., 11 May 2006);available from <http://www.house.gov/tanner/press109-076.htm>; internet; accessed 4 December 2006.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations – Democratic Staff, United States Army Military Readiness report (13 September, 2006) page 2. The word “are” was added to facilitate the readers understanding of the quote.

<sup>19</sup> Jim Tice, “*Dwell time*” back to normal by 2013, two-star testifies (Washington, Army Times, February 12, 2007) page 12. MG Formica further testified that it could be at least five years before the Army fully gets to a rotation schedule that allows Soldiers two years between deployments.

<sup>20</sup> Donna Miles, *Programs Aim to Reduce Military Divorce Rates* (Washington D.C., American Forces Information Service News Articles, 9 June, 2005); available from <http://www.defenselink.mil/Utility/PrintItem.aspx?print=http://www.defenselink.mil/news/>; internet accessed 16 February, 2007. The actual figures reported are as follows: 10,477 divorces

among active-duty forces in FY 2004, a number that has steadily climbed over the past five years. In FY 2003, the U.S. Army reported fewer than 7,500 divorces. In 2002, just over 7,000 and in 2001, approximately 5,600 divorces across the U.S. Army. Most alarming are the officer rates: in 2003 officers experienced 1,900 divorces among the 56,000 married officers, a number that grew to 3,300 in FY 2004, an increase of approximately 1,500.

<sup>21</sup> Karen Jowers, *Domestic violence severity is up, Pentagon data shows* (Washington D.C., Air Force Times, Vol. 66, number 15, 31 October, 2005) available from <http://www.airforcetimes.com/legacy/new/1-292925-1915195.php>; internet accessed, 20 February, 2007. According to the report released by the Pentagon there were 2,374 allegations of sexual assaults reported during 2005, compared to 1,700 in 2004. This is not as alarming as it first appears due to the fact that some of the increase was attributed to a new program that encouraged victims to come forward with reporting the assaults (approximately 435 reports are considered to fall into this category).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>23</sup> Lolita C. Baldor, *Sexual assault reports increase by 40 percent in 2005* (Washington D.C., Air Force Times, Associated Press reporter, 28 June, 2006) page 30; available from [http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/aulimp/citations/2005\\_121930/121599.html](http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/aulimp/citations/2005_121930/121599.html); internet accessed, 16 February, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Mental Health Advisory Team (MHAT-III) Operation Iraqi Freedom 04-06, *Report* (Office of the Surgeon Multinational Force Iraq and Office of the Surgeon General U.S. Army Medical Command, 29 May 2006) page 6.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 11 and 13. Of those Soldiers reporting that they were multiple deployers, 63 percent were married, and averaged 20 months deployed, out of the past four years. 47 percent of the first deployment Soldiers in the report were married, with the average length of months deployed in the past four years being reported as 10 months.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ann Scott Tyson, *Repeat Iraq Tours Raise Risk of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Washington D.C, The Washington Post, 20 December, 2006); available from [http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/document?\\_m=cd3684a5ee1112df63278e12ebab87e6](http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/document?_m=cd3684a5ee1112df63278e12ebab87e6); internet accessed 10 January, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> John Tanner, *Congressional Press Releases* (Washington D.C., 11 May 2006); available from <http://www.house.gov/tanner/press109-076.htm>; internet; accessed 4 December 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> F. Whitten Peters, "EAF: A Journey, Not an End State," (December 1999); available from <http://www.af.mil/lib/policy/letters.p199-12.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Gordon Sullivan, *Association of the United States Army Torchbearer National Security Report*, 2006 and Beyond: What the U.S. Army is Doing (Arlington, Virginia, 27 March 2006), 16.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Headquarters Department of the Army, *The Army*, Field Manual 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 14 June, 2005), page 4-7.

<sup>37</sup> U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations – Democratic Staff, United States Army Military Readiness report (13 September, 2006) page 3.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> David Wood, "Sharply Rising Personnel Costs Force Pentagon Cutbacks," *Newhouse.com* (Washington D.C.: March 2005), page 5.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Government Accounting Office, *Preliminary Observations on Recruiting and Retention Issues within the U.S. Armed Forces*, statement of Derek B. Stewart, Director, Defense Capabilities and Management, before the subcommittee on Military Personnel, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives (Washington D.C.: U.S. General Accounting Office, 16 March, 2005), 1. DoD has expanded eligibility for selective reenlistment bonuses and has also begun offering reenlistment bonuses of as much as \$150,000 to special operation forces personnel with 19 or more years of experience who reenlist for an additional six years. The U.S. Army increased the amount of cash bonuses it offers to new recruits in hard-to-fill military occupations to as much as \$20,000. The U.S. Army also increased its maximum college scholarship from \$50,000 to \$70,000.

<sup>42</sup> William J. Perry, Michele A. Flournoy, *The U.S. Military: Under Strain and at Risk* (Arlington Va: May 2006, Vol. 90, Iss. 630) page 14; available from <http://proquest.umi.com/pdqlink?Ver=1&Exp=02-12-2012&FMT=7&DID=1040339891>; internet accessed 16 February, 2007.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Stop loss orders are credited with retaining approximately 9,800 Soldiers beyond their original commitments.

<sup>44</sup> Mark Mazzetti, *The Conflict in Iraq: Army Rising Promotion Rate Called Ominous; Experts say the quality of the officer corps is threatened as the service fights to retain leaders during wartime and fill new command slots* (Los Angeles, California: Los Angeles Times, 30 January, 2006) page A-1; available from <http://proquest.umi.com/pdqlink?Ver=1&Exp=02-12-2012&FMT=7&DID=977952591&R>; accessed 13 February, 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Sami Yousafzai, Ron Moreau and Mark Hosenball, *Newsweek*, "The re-gathering storm: along the ungoverned border of Pakistan and Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda is training would be Jihadists from the west to attack their home countries," (25 Decemeber 2006-1January 2007); available from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16240565/site/newsweek>; accessed 25 January 2007.

<sup>48</sup> James T. Quinlivan, "Force Requirements in Stability Operations" *Parameters* (Winter 1995) page 7.

